

**Washington, DC** – U.S. Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) voted Thursday for final House passage of H.R. 2647 – the FY 2010 Defense Authorization Bill – which provides a strong framework for equipping our troops, promoting the mission of the U.S. Military and keeping America safe.

“If there is anything the last eight years have taught us, it’s that our nation must continue to be vigilant and ready to face military challenges throughout the world,” said Congressman Rodriguez, who is a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. “We must do our part to support those missions by providing needed resources and support for our troops and their families as they continue to risk life and limb for our nation’s security.”

As a member of the Conference Committee on H.R. 2647, Congressman Rodriguez led the fight to strengthen the bill and ensure its passage through the House. He worked closely with other conferees and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton to move the historic bill forward.

“This defense bill reflects our commitment to support U.S. service members and their families and to provide the necessary resources to keep Americans safe and protect our national interests,” Chairman Skelton said. “The conference report to this year’s defense bill promotes our main policy objectives: restoring military readiness; taking care of our troops and their families; focusing on our strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and on redeployment from Iraq; eliminating waste and recovering savings through acquisition reform; and maintaining robust oversight of the Department of Defense.”

The bill includes a number of elements that will help replenish, strengthen and support our troops, including boosting pay, bolstering TRICARE and improving mental health care services.

The bill calls for a 3.4 percent pay raise for all service members, which will help our troops better provide for their families.

When it comes to veterans’ healthcare, the TRICARE program must be protected. This bill retroactively prohibits fee increases on TRICARE inpatient care for one year (the Defense Department had recently announced TRICARE fee increases, including a \$110-a-day increase

in inpatient hospitalization charges for military retirees and their families). The bill also expands TRICARE health coverage to reserve component members and their families for 180 days prior to mobilization, instead of just 90 days and enables seriously injured service members to use a non-medical attendant for help with daily living or during travel for medical treatment. In the area of mental health care, the bill expands coverage by increasing the number of military mental health providers, and providing DOD scholarships to students pursuing mental health-related degrees. It also requires a medical examination before a service member who has been deployed overseas and diagnosed with either PTSD or TBI can be involuntarily separated, directs DOD to establish an undergraduate nurse training program to help alleviate the shortage of military nurses and provides travel and transportation for three designated persons, including non-family members, to visit hospitalized service members.

Other key items in the bill passed Thursday include:

Increasing the size of the military by 30,000 Army troops, 8,100 Marines, 14,650 AirForce personnel, and 2,477 Navy sailors in Fiscal Year 2010, as requested by President Obama;

Authorizing an additional 30,000 Army troops in Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012;

Authorizing \$11 billion to address the Army's equipment reset requirements in FY 2010, and \$1 billion to address the equipment reset needs of the Marine Corps. This will enable the two services to address their critical shortfalls of equipment;

Providing \$4.7 billion for training opportunities for the Army;

Providing \$255.3 million to refill and maintain prepositioned stocks to help prepare for any future contingencies;

Adding \$350 million for Army trainee barracks construction and \$200 million to support National Guard and Reserve military construction projects;

Adding \$70 million for the Navy's top unfunded requirement, aviation depot maintenance;

Providing \$2.2 billion for family housing programs and requires DOD to review the current standards used to calculate the monthly rates for basic allowance for housing.

Adding \$276 million to support the Housing Assistance Program that helps service members forced to sell their homes at a significant loss

Authorizing \$30 million for Impact Aid to help local educational agencies providing support to our military children, with an additional \$14 million for BRAC-affected areas and an additional \$5 million for military children with severe disabilities;

Establishing an internship pilot program for military spouses to obtain employment with federal agencies to provide them with opportunities in careers that are portable as they move from military station to station;

Banning permanent bases in Afghanistan;

Requiring reports to assess progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan and in Pakistan;

Providing funds to train and equip the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF);

Authorizing up to \$50 million in Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds to support the Afghanistan National Solidarity Program;

Authorizing use of CERP funds to support reintegration into Afghan society of those who have renounced violence against the Government of Afghanistan;

Authorizing the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund to improve the capabilities of Pakistan's security forces, including Pakistan's military and Frontier Corps;

Directing GAO to provide separate reports assessing the strategic plans for Iraq and Afghanistan;

Banning permanent bases in Iraq and prohibits U.S. control of Iraqi oil revenues;

Requiring a report on the responsible redeployment of U.S. Forces from Iraq  
Provides authority to transfer equipment to bolster the Iraqi Security Forces;

Supporting the plan to increase the size of the civilian acquisition workforce;

Enhancing expedited hiring authority to attract quality candidates for defense acquisition workforce positions;

Reducing DOD's reliance on contractors for critical acquisition functions;

Eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse through increased contractor oversight;

Providing \$2.2 billion for DOE's non-proliferation programs, an increase of \$398 million;

Providing \$424 million for Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) initiatives, an increase of \$20 million;

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